

# Bishop Hobart and the Oxford Movement

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND celebrates in 1933 the centenary of the Oxford Movement. For on July 14, 1833, John Keble preached the famous Assize Sermon, which most people follow Newman in regarding as the beginning of the Movement. That Movement has transformed the Church of England, whether we consider the inner life of its devotees, its outward service, and ceremonial, or the doctrines its members consciously profess. It is not, however, my purpose to sketch the history of the revival, but to trace its American connections and antecedents, and to show that there is some reason for thinking that it may have owed its inspiration to the influence and example of a great American Churchman, John Henry Hobart. When writing my short *History of the Christian Church* it dawned upon me that Hobart was certainly the precursor, and possibly the inspirer, of the Oxford Movement. It was, therefore, natural that when working at a book on that Movement<sup>1</sup> I should endeavor to trace this American connection as far as possible. In this I have received most valuable help from Americans, who are surely the kindest people in the world. I should like to mention all the names of those who have written to me or sent me books, but I have only space to mention Clifford P. Morehouse, who

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<sup>1</sup>*The Oxford Movement and After* (Morehouse, \$2.95).

set the ball rolling by broadcasting my quest in *The Living Church*, Dr. Murray Bartlett, Dr. C. H. Brewer, and the Librarians of Hobart College, Geneva, and the General Theological Seminary, New York.

What are the facts?

Church life at the beginning of the century in America, as in England, was sluggish and inactive, and there was a kind of embargo on Catholic teaching. Those who held Catholic doctrines kept them to themselves and remained very much on the defensive. For this there was a political reason. The cause of the Church had been so largely identified with the monarchy that when the United States rejected the monarchy, not only did the Church lose its possessions but its adherents felt that they were only allowed to exist on sufferance and that the less attention they attracted the more likely they were to escape molestation. They therefore preserved a discreet reticence and almost allowed the case for Catholicity to go by default.

John Henry Hobart (1775-1830), who became Bishop of New York in 1811, was the first to break through this tradition.

"Coming down like an armed knight on the plain," as an admirer said of him, "his bold heart rejected such a policy as timid, and his sagacious judgment condemned it as false."<sup>2</sup>

Boldness was, indeed, a conspicuous feature of his character. It is recorded on the monument to his memory in Trinity Church, New York, that it was erected "in honor of the faithful and valiant 'Soldier of Christ' who on all occasions stood forth as the able and intrepid champion of the Church of God."

In 1804 he published a devotional work, with the title, *A Companion for the Altar*, in which he declared his belief

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<sup>2</sup> John McVickar: *Early Life and Professional Years of Bishop Hobart*, p. 513.



in the divine nature of the Church, the distinctive marks of which he claimed to be "primitive faith and apostolic order."

"Could I send my voice," he said, "into every part of Zion I would send it with this holy watchword: 'The Church in her faith, her ministry, her order, her worship, in all her great distinctive principles.'"

His views met with opposition both from those who agreed with him but thought their expression untimely, accusing him of "disturbing the peace of the Church," a charge later to be brought against Newman by those who thought themselves High Churchmen and from those who were accustomed to regard such opinions as hopelessly discredited. When he edited a volume of essays, which appeared in 1806 with the title *A Collection of Essays on the Subject of Episcopacy*, a Presbyterian reviewer denounced the views maintained in them as being "of such deep-toned horror as may well make one's hair stand up like quills upon the fretful porcupine, and freeze the warm blood at the fountain."

In 1808 Hobart established in New York the *Churchman's Magazine*, a monthly periodical for the discrimination of sound opinions on the Church, and in 1810 helped to found a Tract Society.

"As a means of diffusing knowledge," he observed, "I need hardly insist on *The Importance of Religious Tracts*; such as exhibit views of divine truth, in accordance with the sentiments of our Church, and explain her institutions are particularly wanted."<sup>3</sup>

In his style of preaching, Hobart anticipated Newman, by combining Evangelical favor with Catholic doctrine. All contemporary accounts unite in calling attention to the warmth and moving character of his sermons, characteristics which were as alien to the kind of preaching in vogue in the

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<sup>3</sup> *Memorial of Bishop Hobart*, p. vii.

Episcopal Church in America of his day as it was to the sermons of the English High Churchmen. "They knew not whether to call him High Churchman or Methodist."

Hobart had even anticipated Newman's famous argument of the *Via Media*; that, whereas Evangelicals and Liberals had taken from the original deposit of faith, and Roman Catholics had added to and corrupted it, the English Church had alone preserved it undefiled.

"Let not, brethren," he wrote in his charge of 1817, "your attachment to the primitive institutions of your Church be in any degree shaken by the aspersion that they symbolize with papal superstitions. . . . Unawed by papal threats, unmoved by the unjust reproaches of her Protestant kindred, she (the Church) takes her stand where apostles and martyrs once stood; and in her apostolic episcopacy, cleared of papal usurpation, stands forth to the wandering members of the Christian family as a city set on a hill, where they may find repose from schism and communion with their Redeemer in those ministrations which He has established as the channels of His grace, and the pledges of His love."

When Hobart died conditions in England were in many respects very like those which had existed in America a generation earlier. There was, it is true, a definite High Church party, as there was not in America, but though it included some distinguished names, its members, like the American High Churchmen, were reticent and their witness wanted boldness. Words which John Keble, senior, once spoke of his sons, "My boys are good dogs but they cannot bark," might have been said of the party as a whole. Here and there an individual might publish a book but High Churchmen generally were singularly unsuccessful in combating the Evangelical and Liberal opinions, which they abhorred. The average Churchman did not disagree with Catholic doctrines. He had never heard of them. He was like one of the bishops when he first read of the doctrine of the apostolic succession in the



Tracts, and did not know if he believed in it or not. High Churchmen were also less influential than they might have been on account of the stiffness, length, and dullness of their services. Hymns were taboo. The service consisted for the most part of a monotonous dialogue between parson and clerk. The sermon, however learned and instructive, was long and very dull. Any kind of warmth or liveliness was regarded as Methodistical. Dullness was a merit.

Ann Mozley, two of whose brothers married Newman's sisters, says of Isaac Williams, who favored the High Church rather than the Tractarian tradition, that in his delivery, "he studied to be as dull and lumpish as possible," a strange ambition. There used to be a saying current in the East End of London, to the effect that, "The Baptists were all water, the Salvationists all fire, and the Church all starch." This criticism as applied to the High Churchman of the pre-Tractarian era would have had a good deal to justify it.

As a result the idea of the Church as a divine society, with its ministers holders of a divine commission and its sacraments the necessary means of divine grace, was almost unknown to the majority of Churchmen.

"Wherever I go," said William Sikes, a leading High Churchman, in 1833, "about the country, I see amongst the clergy a number of very amiable and estimable men, many of them much in earnest and wishing to do good. But I have observed the universal want in their teaching, the uniform suppression of one great truth. There is no account given anywhere, so far as I can see, of the one Holy Catholic Church."

It was to be the function of the Oxford Movement to breathe life into the dry bones and to proclaim as a kind of slogan belief in the Holy Catholic Church.

Its chief notes were to be:

(1) Its emphasis on holiness as the great aim of the Christian life.

(2) Its insistence on belief in the Holy Catholic Church and its implications, especially the apostolic succession of the ministry, and the importance of Sacraments, as means to holiness.

(3) Its adoption of an aggressive, offensive, outspoken policy in contrast to the defensive, one might almost say defeatist, attitude of the older High Churchman.

"Isaac," said Richard Hurrell Froude to Isaac Williams, Newman's curate, on the eve of the launching of the Movement, "we must make a row in the world." When Williams asked whether, by rousing people they would make them better Christians, Froude said, "Church principle forced on people's notice must work for good."

The Movement was, in fact, to make people better Christians by "making a row in the world" and "forcing its principles on people's notice."

Can we trace any connection between Hobart and the Oxford men? I think we can.

In 1824 Hobart was in England and visited Oxford. One brief notice is all that has come to light concerning this visit.

"Bishop Hobart, of New York," Newman wrote in March, 1824, "is in Oxford, and I dined with him at the Provost's yesterday. He is an intelligent man and gave us a good deal of information on the affairs of the American Episcopal Church."

Now there is every reason for thinking that the information which Hobart imparted was considerable. With many men our writing like this would not go for very much, but not in the case of Hobart, for we know that he was a great talker. A friend of W. M. Thackeray, Edward Churton, who met him in Hackney says that "his words were ready to flow as from an unexhausted fountain."

"We have been much interested with Bishop Hobart," wrote Mr. Sikes. "He is vastly pleasant and brimful. He made a thou-



sand apologies for talking so much; but we should have been sorry had he talked less."

By July, 1836, Newman had become joint editor of the *British Critic*, which was then passing under Tractarian influence, and there appeared in that journal in April, 1837, an article headed, *The Church Principles of Bishop Hobart*, in which the Bishop was held up to admiration.

"He strove," wrote Mr. Acland, writer of the article, "to impart the spirit of the primitive writings, and to combine the forcible reasoning and the sacred fervor of the great English divines."

In October, 1839, when Newman was sole editor there appeared an article by him on the American Church, which was largely a eulogy of Bishop Hobart. He began by praising the American Church. "Few passages in the history of the Church are better calculated to raise the Christian heart in admiration and gratitude to the giver of all good, than her fortunes in the United States of America." But the article was mainly taken up with Hobart.

"To write encomiums here," he wrote, "upon one whose praise is in all the Churches and whose memory is interesting personally to many around us who saw him when in England, would be beside the purpose."

He examined at length Hobart's *celebre dictum*, namely evangelical truth and apostolic order.

By this *celebre dictum* Newman understood Hobart to mean a combination in due proportion of Church tradition and order with Evangelical fervor. It shows at least that Newman had been a sufficiently close student of Hobart's life and writings to seize on the original feature of his genius, the combination of belief in Church order with evangelical fervor in its presentation, which was, in fact, one secret of Newman's own influence as a preacher. The Evangelicals

were fervent and appealed to the feelings, but cared nothing for the order or tradition of the Church. The High Church party made their doctrines unpopular because they deliberately aimed at being stiff and dry and as unlike Evangelicals as possible. Not so Newman who appealed to the heart as well as to the head. When he wrote of Hobart:

"According he labored and labored successfully to persuade persons that true Catholicism did not exclude the religious affections, but trained them up to perfection in a right direction and upon a perfect model. The affections are the life of religion; but life does not exist except realized and made substantive in this or that subject,"

he lets us behind the scenes, so to speak, of his own preaching.

This is not to say that so great a man as Newman imitated Hobart. He had himself been brought up as an Evangelical and had been taught therefore to regard an emotional style of preaching with favor and not with the abhorrence which it excited in High Churchmen. At the same time Newman was, especially in the early days of the Movement, much under the influence of men like Keble and Hurrell Froude, who were both very shy of any expression of feeling. "People will take Keble for a Methodist," wrote Froude in disgust when he first read the *Christian Year*, a work which few would accuse of sentimentality. The example of Hobart therefore may well have encouraged Newman to follow the bent of his own genius.

We are perhaps on surer ground when we suggest that the idea of Tracts as a means of propagating Catholic doctrine came from Hobart. Tracts were common enough but they had been hitherto in England, as in America before 1810, an exclusively Evangelical weapon. They were emotional in tone, lurid in style, and their appeal was to the sentimental and ignorant. Their very name was anathema to High Churchmen. When after Keble's sermon the Hadleigh



Conference was held and settled that something must be done but could not for the life of it decide what that something was to be, Newman "out of his own head" began the Tracts. Was it so entirely out of his own head as he thought thirty years later? So far as any English suggestion went, the answer is *yes*. But it is not so certain about America. Had not Bishop Hobart discoursed about the affairs of the American Episcopal Church, and is it likely that he said nothing about the Tract Society which he had founded, and the importance of Tracts for "diffusing knowledge of religious truth and explaining the institutions of the Church"?

We have, considering the very deep impression that Hobart's personality and writings made upon him, a probability that Newman owed to him the idea of Tracts which were to be aggressive, outspoken, recalling their readers to first principles. In their general aim and scope the Tracts for the Times closely resemble the productions of Hobart's Tract Society. "In the character of its Tracts," wrote McVickar, Bishop Hobart can counter as usual to the popular current; that went for excitement, he went for instruction; that was for incident, he was for doctrine." This description would have equally applied to the aims of the English Tract writers, though in both cases the very novelty of the doctrine did arouse a good deal of excitement.

We must not look for similarities in detail. Newman possessed a wonderfully vivid and fertile imagination. Whatever he touched with the fairy wand of his genius he transformed. If he once had the idea of the Tracts he could develop it according to his own bent. The Tracts are, in part, very much what we should expect them to be, if we knew that he had got the idea from Hobart.

It is not possible to prove that Hobart inspired Newman, though I think it probable. There can, however, be no doubt that he was the prophet of a Movement in America similar to the Oxford Movement. If we ask why it made less stir and

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in appearance, has had less influence, we must remember that circumstances were different. England is a small country. Nearly half the clergy of the Church of England and half the members of the learned professions were educated at Oxford. The most brilliant men of each generation, on graduating, became fellows of their colleges and remained in Oxford until they married, on condition, in most cases, that they took holy orders. There was therefore at Oxford a remarkable concentration of those most amenable to religious influence, and Newman by virtue of his position as vicar of St. Mary's, the university church, had a marvelous platform at his command. It was one of those rare and happy occasions when the man and the moment seem by some providence to coalesce. London would not have given him an opportunity at all comparable with that which Oxford provided. He would have been one among the many famous preachers who have from time to time stirred to some extent the religious life of the metropolis. His influence would have been too diffused. The river which is to run a great distance before reaching the sea must in its early stages be confined within comparatively narrow banks.

Hobart had no such opportunity as Newman. America is a very big country and its population in Hobart's day was thin. The area of Hobart's influence was as diffused as that of Newman's was concentrated. No one would claim for him Newman's genius, though he possessed qualities of stability and judgment which Newman lacked. But he was a great man and a pioneer, of whom any Church might be proud and one who is too little known in England, and, I suspect though this is only a guess, in the country of his birth.